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UNCLAS LJUBLJANA 000822

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EUR/NCE
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TAGS: [TBIO](#) [SENV](#) [ECON](#) [EAGR](#) [EAID](#) [PREL](#) [SI](#)

SUBJECT: SLOVENIA ON CONTROLLING AVIAN FLU: PART TWO

REF: A. LJUBLJANA 0807

[B](#). STATE 209622

[1](#)1. (U) Summary: On 28 November, Econoff and Econ Assistant met with Dr. Marija Seljak, Director General of the Public Health Directorate at the Slovene Ministry of Health, to discuss Slovenia's preparedness for a potential influenza pandemic. Following is a summary of measures the Health Ministry has undertaken to ready Slovenia for a potential health crisis. End Summary.

PREPAREDNESS/COMMUNICATION

[1](#)2. (U) As reported ref A, Slovenia's Veterinary Administration has the lead within the GOS for avian flu matters. Seljak said the Health Ministry cooperates very closely with the Veterinary Administration. She said, however, that the Health Ministry is currently focused on preparing for a potential pandemic of influenza. Noting that it is "very difficult" for humans to contract the H5N1 virus, Seljak said that most of her agency's time is spent on addressing concerns associated with a possible mutation of the virus into a form easily transmitted to and among people.

[1](#)3. (U) Referring to a simulation performed last week in cooperation with the EU, Seljak termed Slovenia to be well-prepared to handle a potential pandemic. She said the simulation helped the Ministry identify possible holes in the Health Ministry's preparedness plan and that the Ministry was working to address this (the plan is available at <http://www2.gov.si/mz/mz-sple.nsf>, click on "nacrt pripravljanosti na pandemijo pticje gripe-verzija 2.0". Slovene only.). Seljak noted that her only concern in the "most pessimistic scenario" would be a undercapacity in hospital space as well as insufficient medical practitioners. She said, however, that this situation was no different from other Western European nations.

[1](#)4. (U) Seljak said that Slovenia administers annual flu shots and the typical demand is for approximately 150-180 thousand doses. (Note: Slovenia's population is slightly less than two million. End note.) Given the increased concern about avian flu, however, Seljak expects that this year Slovenia will administer approximately 300 thousand shots. She further said that Slovenia does not produce human influenza vaccines.

[1](#)5. (U) One of the areas for improvement in Slovenia's preparedness is improving the general public's understanding of avian flu, according to Seljak. She said the public is confused by the different types of flu: avian flu that is widely reported in the media, the flu strains that are typical in the winter, and the potential for a pandemic influenza. Seljak said the Ministry is currently working on a new communication strategy that will help the public understand the differences and risks associated with the different types of flu. She said the Ministry has published a list of influenza-related frequently asked questions and that these were reprinted in the most widely-read newspapers and magazines. Seljak also said the Ministry was evaluating the potential benefit of printing informational flyers and brochures for distribution to households throughout the country.

SURVEILLANCE/DETECTION

[1](#)6. (U) In addition to the subtyping capabilities of the Veterinary Administration (ref A), Seljak noted that the Slovene National Institute of Public Health was well-equipped and very capable of diagnosing and subtyping new strains of influenza. She said that the Institute enjoys "stable financing" and was staffed with well-educated scientists. In addition, Seljak said that Ministry of Health identifies 3-5 medical practitioners in each region of Slovenia who submit throat swabs to the Institute when a patient complains of flu-like symptoms. As required, Seljak said samples from Slovenia are sent to a reference lab in the U.K. for

additional testing.

RESPONSE/CONTAINMENT

17. (U) As noted ref A, Slovenia will begin stockpiling doses of Tamiflu in 2006. Seljak said the Ministry expected the first shipment to take place in March, to be followed by a second shipment in calendar Q4. Seljak also said that

Slovenia does have some protective gear available for use by the general public, but that most of the gear is at hospitals and is intended for the use of healthcare workers. In addition, Seljak said while the GOS "might" be willing to enforce quarantines for the "first patients" of a pandemic, she did not see the need for a general quarantine. She said that even with a quarantine, it is likely that any pandemic will still spread.

ROBERTSON

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